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A Short History & Self-Guided Tour of

# MONTANA'S CAPITOL BUILDING



*a publication of the Montana Historical Society*

OFFICE OF THE GOVERNOR  
STATE OF MONTANA



MARC RACICOT  
GOVERNOR



STATE CAPITOL  
HELENA, MONTANA 59620-0801

Welcome to the Montana State Capitol. I hope you enjoy your visit as much as I appreciate working in this wonderful building.

The Montana State Capitol has served as the center of state government for the people of Montana for nearly 100 years. While many changes occurred during those years, the building remains a symbol of our state's rich heritage. The classic appearance of the Capitol, combined with murals depicting the places and people of Montana make this a place with special meaning for all visitors.

While the Capitol is a monument with historic importance, it also continues to serve its original purpose as the center of Montana government. This building belongs to and serves the citizens of Montana and we are delighted to open its doors to all who wish to join us in the process of governing the Treasure State and those who wish to enjoy this part of our heritage. Access to all, care for the public's safety and security, and provision of an efficient working environment are our concerns.

As you travel through the Capitol you will note its restoration needs are many. We have plans to repair deteriorating stonework on exterior walls and cracks in columns in the rotunda, to restore decorative painting and plasterwork, and to replace historic features removed in past remodeling projects. While preserving the Capitol we also want to incorporate new technology that will help us control its environment so historic features will be protected and people can move and work efficiently.

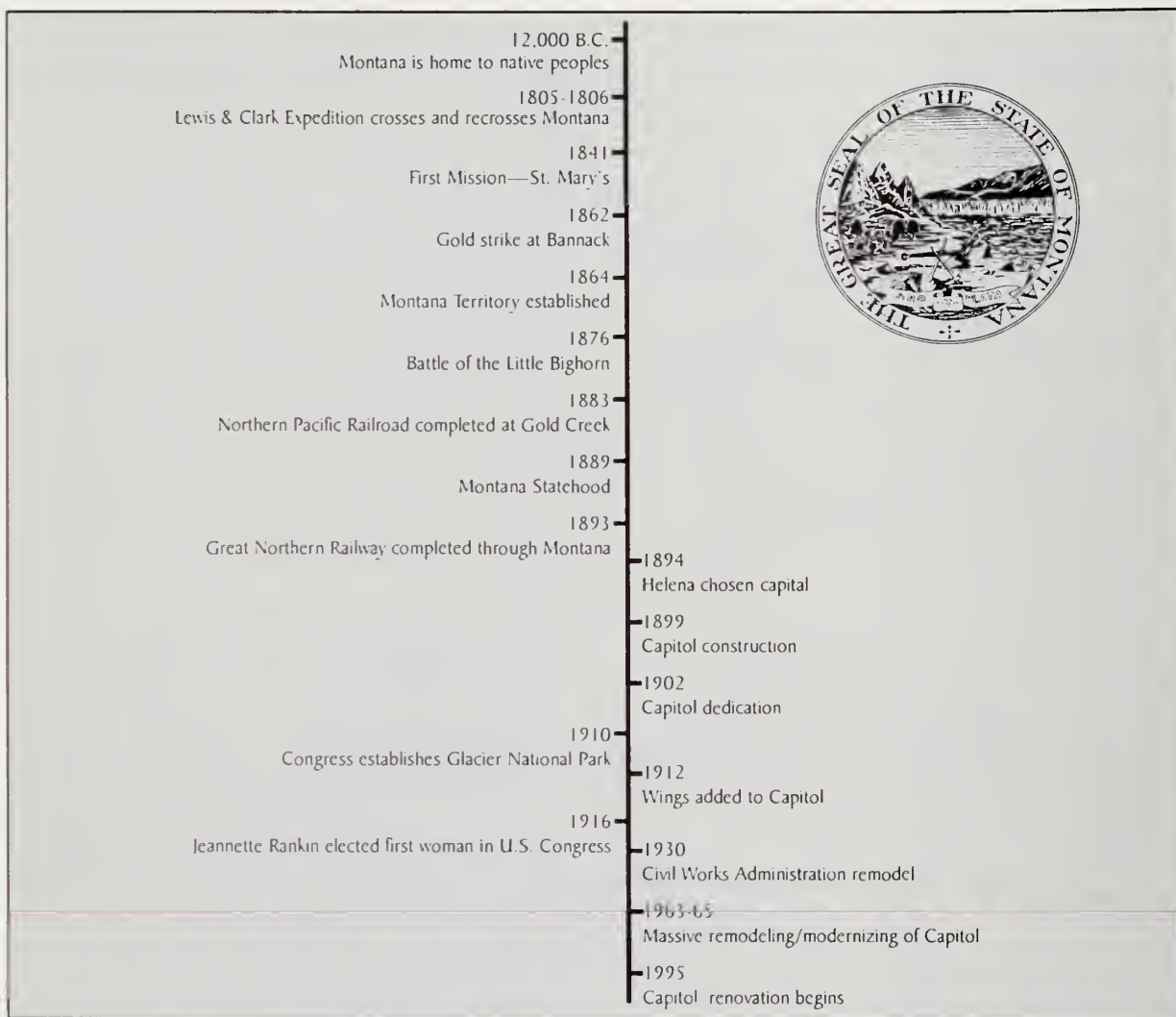
The Montana Capitol Restoration Commission is planning for a full historic restoration and upgrade of the Capitol by its Centennial Anniversary in 2002. Meeting this goal will take the financial support of many. Please join those who have already contributed to the restoration project.

Enjoy your visit with us here in the Capitol and where ever your travel may take you in the Last Best Place.

Sincerely,

MARC RACICOT  
Governor

## Introduction: A BRIEF HISTORY OF MONTANA and her CAPITOL



Situated against a backdrop of the hills of Helena, the Montana State Capitol commands a panoramic view of the Helena Valley. Explorers Meriwether Lewis and William Clark called this area "*Prickly Pear Valley*" when they traversed it in 1805. A century of exploration, trapping, prospecting, mining, settlement and development occurred in what became Montana, before the construction of a State Capitol was achieved.

The mining camp of Last Chance Gulch was born with the discovery of placer gold by the "Four Georgians" in 1864. The fledgling camp soon changed to Helena. Surprisingly, the community did not die when the gold ran out—because the merchants turned it into a banking and supply center. By 1875 Helena had wrested the Montana Territorial capital from Virginia City.

When Montana joined the Union in 1889, a battle for the permanent state capital ensued. In 1894 Helena (backed by Copper King William A. Clark) opposed Anaconda (supported by Copper King Marcus Daly) for this honor. Helena's victory assured it a state capitol building, yet the national Crash of 1893 initially delayed construction.

Finally, optimism about the state's future led the 1895 legislature to enact laws authorizing a \$1 million Capitol, its design to be chosen in a nationwide architectural competition. Cash prizes were awarded and a design selected before funding problems were understood to be insurmountable. To make matters worse, scandal erupted when it was discovered that the Capitol commissioners themselves planned to defraud the state of substantial portions of the building's cost. Investigations were conducted in time to prevent the graft, replace the commissioners, and begin anew.

The 1897 legislature then authorized a more modest statehouse. The completed, furnished building, located on its donated parcel of land, cost approximately \$485,000—less than one-half the price of the abandoned design.

In 1898 Charles Emlen Bell and John Hackett Kent of Council Bluffs, Iowa, were selected as the Capitol architects, on the condition that they would relocate to Helena to fulfill a legislative provision requiring selection of a Montana architect. Although denounced by the state's resident architects, the selection proved to be a fortunate one, resulting in a handsome design that was promptly realized. After a festive corner-

stone-laying ceremony on Independence Day, 1899, Bell and Kent's "Greek Ionic" neoclassical Capitol was constructed, faced in sandstone from a Columbus, Montana, quarry. The building was dedicated with much appreciative fanfare on July 4, 1902.

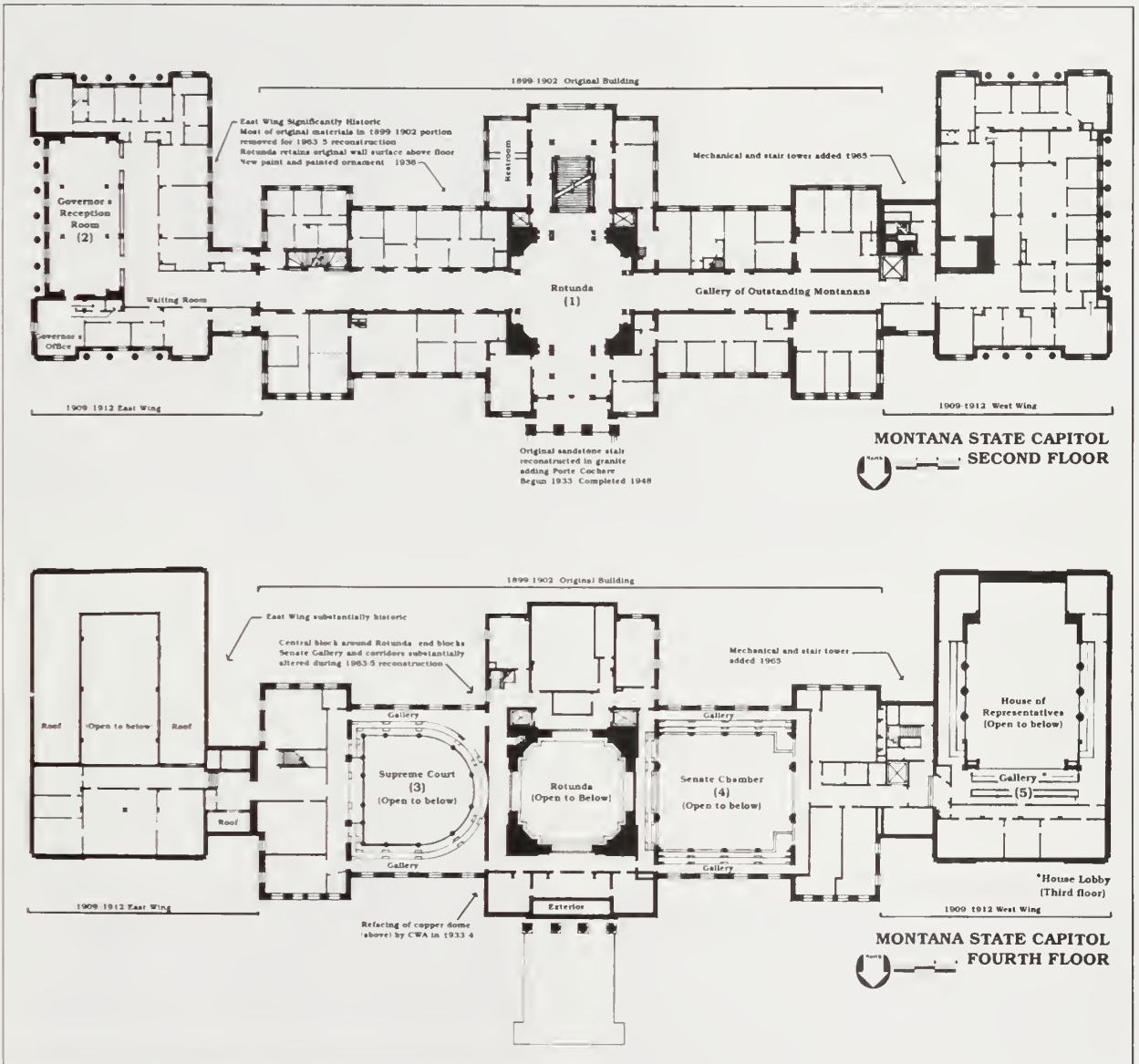
After its first decade, the Capitol was enlarged (1909-1912) to accommodate the growing executive, legislative and judicial branches of government. East- and West-wing additions were designed by New York architect Frank M. Andrews in association with Montanans John G. Link and Charles S. Haire. The much-debated selection of stone for facing the wings required a special session of the legislature, which chose Jefferson County granite. A good match for the Columbus sandstone used in the original building, the granite held the added advantage of durability.

The State Capitol is a structure with several historical dimensions. Interwoven with Montana's development as a state, the building's origins recall people and practices from another age. These turn-of-the-century Montanans, conscious of their place in the progression of time, chose architecture and art that described a remote classical past as well as the passing era of the frontier. Yet they focused optimistically on the future as well. Today the Capitol is listed on the National Register of Historic Places and continues to be associated with events significant to the citizens and government of Montana. Now, after years of "modernization," the Capitol is being treated to sound maintenance. These changes will improve functioning and restore it to historical accuracy.



Montana State Capitol January, 1902

# SELF-GUIDED TOUR OF THE MONTANA CAPITOL



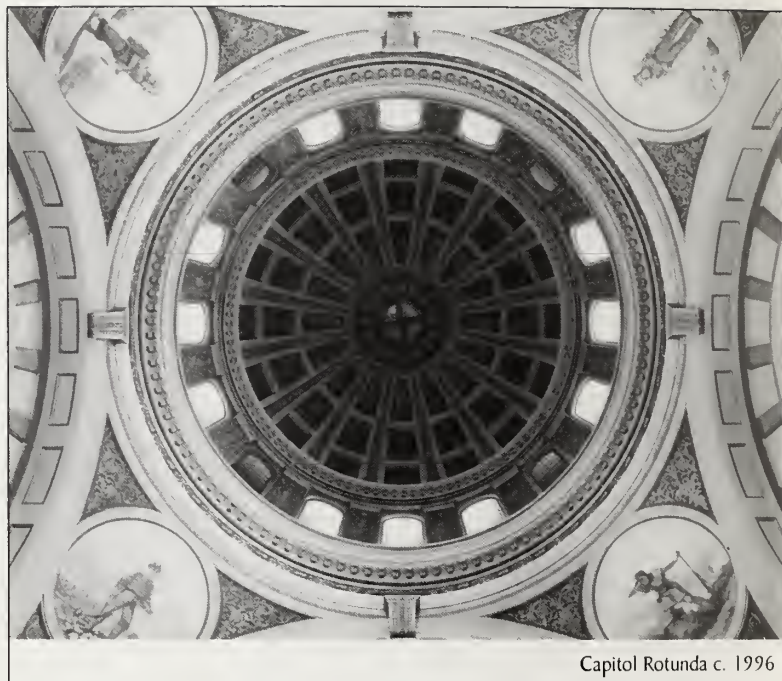
Begin your self-guided tour in the Rotunda. (1)

*The Rotunda*, Montana's best-dressed official space, greets lawmakers and visitors alike with French Renaissance styling, scagliola Ionic columns (scagliola is a plaster technique that

mimics marble), Tennessee marble wainscoting, terrazzo tile floor, and a frescoed dome.

Originally, a barrel-vault skylight over the grand stairway heightened the Rotunda's elegance, as did deep red walls and glass-block floor tiles — all elements removed in the 1960s. The four

decorative paintings above, completed by F. Pedretti's Sons in 1902, introduce you to Montana's turn-of-the century most storied contributors: *the Native American, the cowboy, the explorer/trapper, and the prospector*. To the right of the painting of the Native American is Amedee Joullin's *The Driving of the Golden Spike*. It documents the completion of the transcontinental Northern Pacific Railroad in 1883 at Gold Creek, Montana—an event almost as important as statehood. Portrait busts (from right to left) of nationally prominent U.S. Senators *Thomas J. Walsh, Joseph M. Dixon (who also served as governor for one term), and Burton K. Wheeler,*



Capitol Rotunda c. 1996

occupy niches in the corners of the Rotunda. Opposite the main entrance, in the grand stair hall, is a statue of *Jeannette Rankin*, the first woman to be elected to the U.S. Congress. In 1917 she voted with 55 other representatives against U.S. involvement in World War I and was the only member of Congress to vote against U.S. involvement in World War II.

Proceed down the main hallway on your left (to the east,) as you face the grand stairway. The receptionist will direct you to the Governor's Reception Room, if it is not in use. (2)

The Governor's Reception Room, part of the 1912 addition, hosts meetings, receptions, and press conferences. It was designed as an English Tudor "period room" with oak paneling, fluted oak columns, ornamental-nonfunctional fireplaces graced with Vermont marble mantel pieces, hand-painted ceiling, and antique silver-plate chandeliers

and wall sconces. Find the state flower (bitterroot) design in the trefoil ceiling pattern, the state seal on the door knobs, the portrait of *Joseph K. Toole*, Montana's first governor, above the north fireplace, the "hidden" door into the Governor's office beside that fireplace, and the portrait of *Wilbur Fisk Sanders*, one of Montana's first U. S. Senators.

Return to the Rotunda. Ascend the grand stairway. Turn left and climb the nearby flight of stairs. Enter the door marked 411; or take one of the elevators on either side of the grand stairway to the 4th floor. Turn left and enter the door marked 411 at the head of the small stairway. (3)

This chamber has enjoyed three lives. It originally housed Montana's Senate for a decade. It was the State Supreme Court from 1912 to 1983. When the Supreme Court moved to the new Justice Building, this elegant space became a committee

and public-meeting room. The scagliola columns designed to resemble Italian marble, the mahogany furniture, the stained-glass skylight, and the paintings are original. From left to right, the Pedretti murals represent *Gates of the Mountains*, *Wagon Train Under Attack by Indians*, *Approval of Montana's Constitution*, *Lewis' First View of the Rocky Mountains*, *Signing the Enabling Act*, *Buffalo Chase*, and *The Last of the Buffalo*. A centrally placed bronze plaque honors *Chief Justice Theodore Brantly*, who served on the court from 1899 to 1922.



Initially the House of Representatives, this room became the Senate in 1912 when the House moved into the new west wing. Today's modernized Senate bears little resemblance to the original chamber. The stained-glass ceiling, chandelier, arched gallery openings, and wooden desks were replaced in a 1960's remodeling. Wall coverings and carpet were replaced in 1994 to present a more historically accurate decor.

desk. Votes are registered electronically and appear in lights on the large black board at your eye level to the front of the chamber. The chamber experienced the greatest change of any public space during the 1960's renovation. It is "original" only above the gilt column capitals. Even the original skylight was replaced with electric light fixtures.

The Pedretti murals here tell more chapters of Montana's early settlement: starting at the left, *Lewis and Clark at Three Forks*, *Dawson and Chouteau at Old Fort Benton*, *The Louisiana Purchase*, *Prospectors at Nelson*

*Gulch*, *Fathers Ravalli and DeSmet at St. Mary's Mission*, and *Custer's Last Battle* (This last mural can be seen from the opposite side of the chamber as you leave). The painting above the rostrum is a copy of Charles M. Russell's *When the Land Belonged to God*. The original is on exhibit at the Montana Historical Society, located across Roberts Street, east of the Capitol.

Exit through the door you entered. Turn right and follow the hallway around two sides of the Rotunda and through a door into the gallery of the Senate. (4)

This space, originally the House chamber, has served as the Senate Chamber since 1912. The Senate consists of fifty senators, elected for four-year terms. The President of the Senate occupies the chair at the head of the rostrum, with legislative staff members seated in the half-circle immediately below. The seating at the base of the rostrum accommodates pages, who act as messengers for the senators. To summon a page, or to vote, the senators press the appropriate button on the box located on each

Exit Senate Gallery through the door behind the large vote board. Proceed down this hallway into the House Gallery. This door may be locked when the House is not in session. If the door is locked, take the stairs or the elevator to the third floor. Turn left and enter the Lobby of the House of Representatives. (5)

The House Lobby is decorated with six paintings by Montana artist Edgar S. Paxson—a contemporary of Charles M. Russell. In 1911 Paxson was commissioned to create murals depicting important events in the history of Native American-white relations. He chose to illustrate (left to right) *After the Whiteman's Book*, *The Border Land*, *Lewis and Clark at Three Forks*, *Lewis at Black Eagle Falls*, *Pierre de la Verendrye*, and *The Surrender of Chief Joseph*.

Through the glass doors of the Lobby you can see the House of Representatives. This chamber occupies the west wing of the 1912 addition to the Capitol. Never significantly remodeled, the room features solid Vermont marble columns and wainscoting, glass sky lights, and original oak furnishings.

The House of Representatives consists of one hundred representatives, elected to two-year terms. Because the Montana Legislature meets every other year for a ninety-day session, members must be re-elected for each session in which they serve. The Speaker of the House is the presiding officer. He occupies the position at the head of the rostrum, with legislative staff at the next level below. Pages, who are seated encircling the rostrum, are summoned by lights controlled at each desk. Those controls also connect to the electronic voting system, which registers each representative's vote on the boards at the front corners of the chamber.

Charles M. Russell's painting, *Lewis and Clark Meeting Indians at Ross' Hole*, dominates the chamber. The painting portrays a scene which took place on September 4, 1805, when the Lewis and Clark expedition met the Salish Indians in the Sula Basin area in southwestern Montana. The Captains

were looking for a northern pass by which, they had been told, the Nez Percés crossed the mountains in Idaho. The expedition leaders were anxious to reach the Pacific Ocean before winter snows impeded their travel. Clark describes the meeting with the Indians in his journal:

*September 4th Wednesday 1805*

*...prosued our Course down the Creek to the forks about 5 miles where we met a part[y] of the Tushepau [Salish] nation, of 33 Lodges bout 80 men 400 Total and at least 500 horses, those people rec[e]ved us friendly, threw white robes over our Shoulders & Smoked in the pipes of peace, we Encamped with them and found them friendly, The Chief harangued untill late at night, Smoked in our pipe and appeared Satisfied. I was the first white man who ever wer on the waters of this river.*

*September 5th Thursday 1805*

*we assembled the chiefs and warriors and Spoke to them with much difficuelt[y] as what we Said had to pass through Several languages before it got into theirs, which is a gugling kind of language Spoken much thro the throught [throat] in the Course of the day I purchase[d] 11 horses and exchanged 7 for which we gave a few articles of merchandise, those people possess elegant horses.*

Lewis and Clark can be seen on the far right hand side of the painting, not in the center of the work as might be expected. This composition emphasizes that Lewis and Clark were merely traveling through a region dominated by the Native Americans. Those who view the painting are meant to see this meeting from the perspective of the Salish Indians.









HALF-ELEVATION ABOVE SECOND FLOOR  
REAR CENTER WING

— Half-Elevation above Second Floor —

Rear Center Wing

~Montana State Capitol~

~Bell & Kent Architects~

## Statues at the Capitol

*Liberty* (1902) - A bronze statue of "Lady Liberty," holding a torch and shield, tops the Capitol dome.

*Thomas Francis Meagher* (1905) - An equestrian statue in front of the Capitol depicts the Civil War general who twice served as acting governor of Montana Territory.

*Wilbur Fisk Sanders* (1913) - The standing statue facing the south entrance to the Capitol represents one of Montana's first U.S. senators. Sanders was also a leader of the vigilantes of Virginia City and a Montana Historical Society founder.

*Jeannette Rankin* (1980) - A statue honoring the first woman elected to the U.S. Congress stands behind the grand staircase.

*Thomas Walsh* (bust in the Rotunda) - Walsh served in the U.S. Senate from 1913 to 1933. He was chairman of a special Senate committee that investigated the Teapot Dome scandal.

*Burton K. Wheeler* (bust in the Rotunda) - Wheeler served in the U.S. Senate from 1923 to 1947. He ran for vice-president on the Progressive Party ticket with Robert LaFollette in 1924.

*Joseph Dixon* (bust in the Rotunda) - Dixon, who served in the U.S. House and the U.S. Senate, was Governor of Montana from 1921 to 1925.



## SERVICES IN THE CAPITOL

Restrooms - located on the 1st and 2nd floors, to the left of the grand staircase.

Elevators - There are three elevators that access all 4 floors of the building, including the basement:

*On the 1st floor* they are located to the left and the right of the staircase and at the end of the right corridor.

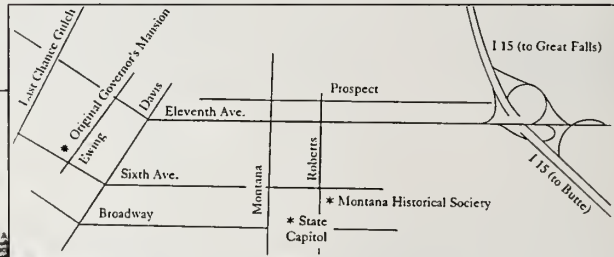
*On the 2nd floor* they are located to the left and the right of the grand staircase and at the end of the right corridor, just before the Secretary of State's Office.

Post Office - on the 1st floor. Open from 8:00 to 11:30 a.m. weekdays.

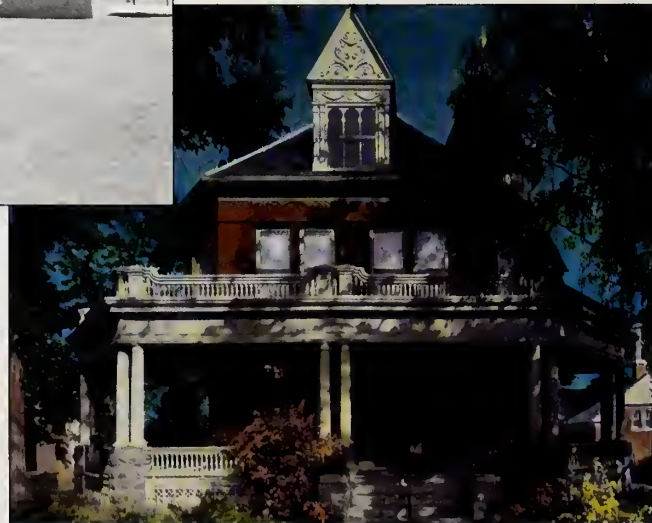
Snack Bar - in the basement of the Capitol.

Phones - Public pay phones are available on the 1st floor of the building on the left side of the staircase.

Handicapped Access to the House Gallery - a lift is available for wheelchairs to negotiate the last few steps to the House Gallery. Keys to work the electric lift are available from the Tour Guide Desk on the second floor or from the Security Desk on the 1st floor.



Montana's Museum and Museum Shop - in the Montana Historical Society, located directly across the street to the east of the Capitol. Postcards, books, prints, and souvenirs are some of the many items available in the Museum Shop. The Museum features the Mackay Gallery of Charles M. Russell, Montana Homeland, F. Jay Haynes: Photographer, and various temporary exhibits. Call (406) 444-4789 for group-tour reservations.



The Original Governor's Mansion is the historic home of some of Montana's early governors. Tours are available several months throughout the year. Call (406) 444-4789 for tour information.